

CEO to idea broker

Leadership Lessons Learned, by Rhea Blanken, Results Technology
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Association boards have come to expect, even demand, their executives be “thinking leaders.” No longer is being a great manager of staff and processes enough. With the publishing of ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership’s book, ***7 Measures for Success, What Remarkable Associations Do That Others Don’t***, there is no longer any doubt that assn executives are at the center of the action.

When it comes to generating and facilitating new ideas that lead to success, executives and their staff must now be adept at generating ongoing “creative thinking.” It is like expecting a comedian to be funny even when he is not doing his shtick—having to come up with creative ideas at the drop of a hat. However, if you don’t consider yourself particularly creative, then what? Learn the skills and processes for generating creative thinking. It can even be fun!

In 1970, Dr. Edward de Bono, an authority on creativity, wrote ***Lateral Thinking, Creativity Step by Step***. This book was designed to instruct us in thinking creatively as one would learn any other skill or expand a competency. We are not usually educated to think creatively or instructed specifically how to generate new ideas and ways of thinking – even the idea of learning how to be a better thinker would be something valued by both left-brain and right-brain thinkers. Using this approach, de Bono has worked with major corporations to encourage constructive thinking for years.

By 1985, de Bono wrote ***Six Thinking Hats, An Essential Approach to Business Management***. He showed how businesses can think together in a way to reduce meeting times (prediction: by three-quarters), improve individual and team decision-making, and hone-in on being in action rather than being in debate.

What if, by attending to the ways we did our group thinking, we could identify where and how time-consuming and unproductive our meetings were. Then we could make them more focused and action-oriented, thus securing opportunities

for more generative thinking. Doesn't it all sound so easy and obvious? It is. De Bono organized the practice of thinking into six focus areas – “hats” – assigning colors to make it even easier to imagine their usage. We each have a favorite color that filters our thinking. Now we must “try on” thinking with the other colors to generate new ideas and new actions. The six “hats” are:

- White – facts, figures and objective- type information
- Yellow – thinks and expresses in positive constructive thoughts
- Black – logical yet seemingly negative thoughts and ideas
- Red – considers and expresses in emotions and feelings thoughts
- Green – creative and new ideas
- Blue – orchestra leader, making sure all the hats are heard and appreciated.

Companies such as DuPont, Procter & Gamble and Prudential use this instructive methodology to forward and focus their corporate thinking. So too can assn executives enhance their skills for generating thinking by practicing de Bono's model. Consider setting aside time during your next staff meeting. Select an issue or obstacle that consistently surfaces but rarely moves forward in action. Have staff discuss the issue thinking and speaking from each of the models described above. New attitudes and points of view will surface thus moving the topic forward.

If you are still uneasy and hesitant in practicing new thinking, then combine de Bono's hats with Michalko's SCAMPER method of inquiry. Michael Michalko, in his book ThinkerToys, said “everything new is really an addition to or modification of something that already existed.” He explains that to create any new idea, product, service, process or eventual breakthrough there are nine key ways of thinking through what needs to occur by using the SCAMPER method. Ask yourself can I:

- substitute something?
- combine it with something else?
- adapt something to it?
- magnify or add to it?
- modify or change it in some fashion?
- put it to some other use?
- eliminate something?
- rearrange it?
- What happens when I reverse it?

By combining the practices of inquiry and dialogue suggested by de Bono and Michalko, your staff meetings (try this with your boards, too) can become opportunities for generating new thinking rather than the replaying of old thoughts; being in action rather than talking over and over about eventually doing; and really experiencing new realities that promote your present and future successes. With the stage set for you as CEO: idea broker, you can do this!

“You can’t dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper.”

Edward de Bono

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